

Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments
Appropriations Hearing
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Housing
Wednesday, February 16th, 2022

Wendy Epstein
Director of Supportive Housing
Homes with Hope

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 5037 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023). I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is **Wendy Epstein** and I work in **Westport** and am a resident of **Westport**, CT.

As the Director of Supportive Housing at Homes with Hope, I know, first hand, that safe, affordable, and permanent housing is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for permanent housing for all of Connecticut's residents was made even more important.

I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing (DOH):

- I support the preservation of DOH's following FY23 allocations:
 - \$2.935 million Homeless Youth line
 - \$85.323 million Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$637K Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$100 million bond authorization for the Affordable Housing FLEX Fund and \$50 million bond authorization for the state Housing Trust Fund
- I support an additional \$2.3 million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to provide critical staff infrastructure support to [Coordinated Access Networks \(CANs\) and 2-1-1](#). CANs provide streamlined access to the homeless services system at the regional level. 2-1-1 serves as the statewide single point of entry to CANs.
- I support an increase to DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line by at least \$20 million in FY23 to expand the [Rental Assistance Program \(RAP\)](#), including \$2 million to provide rental assistance to 200 scattered-site supportive housing units for highly vulnerable individuals and families.
- I support an additional \$2.5 million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to establish and implement a [proven eviction prevention model](#) that leverages Right to Counsel legal services and couples them with high-quality social work to address vulnerable renter's needs.
- I support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations

- I also support providing an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (\$8.08 million at DOH and \$5.26 million at DMHAS) to provide homeless and housing service organizations [funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers](#), increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology via:
 - \$7.47 million increase in DOH Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$169K increase in DOH Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$436K increase in DOH Homeless Youth line

Additionally, I support the governor's proposed allocation of \$50 million in American Rescue Plan recovery funds to support the creation of 350 additional housing units affordable to households with incomes between 30% and 50% of area median income.

Homelessness is solvable. Connecticut can make homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time experience by investing in what works: housing, supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents.

I have sadly seen countless examples of clients (as well as staff members) struggle to find affordable housing in this area. Our agency is based in Westport, but it is literally impossible to find anything remotely affordable in this town. The fair market rent for a two bedroom apartment is \$2,230. In order to afford a small apartment for her family a single mom would have to earn almost \$50 an hour (far more than I earn with a Master's Degree in social work)! Unfortunately, individuals with limited income will continue to struggle without government support.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut's future beyond the pandemic— it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Epstein, LCSW'.

Wendy Epstein, LCSW
Director of Supportive Housing
Wepstein@hwhct.org